

Exhibit No. 1Date 2-8-07Bill No. SB 243

Senate Bill 243  
February 8, 2007  
Presented by M. Jeff Hagener  
Senate Finance and Claims Committee

Madame Chair and committee members, for the record I am Jeff Hagener, Director of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

FWP recognizes the sacrifices our military personnel and their families make on behalf of our country. Providing reduced cost or free hunting and/or fishing privileges is one way the citizens of Montana can show their appreciation for this service and sacrifice.

As with other legislation considered this session, FWP believes it appropriate that the general fund reimburse the department's general license account for the costs associated with any reduced cost or free privileges granted to our military personnel. This assures that all Montanans, not just hunters and anglers, contribute to honoring our veterans. The Senate Fish and Game Committee agreed and amended SB 243 to provide such reimbursement.

When reimbursement of the general license account came up during this committee's hearing on SB 112 by Senator Lewis, which also provides discounted license privileges to military personnel, Legislative Fiscal staff raised a number of issues. I would like to address those issues in the context of SB 243.

The first issue related to the current fund balance in the general license account, and its ability to absorb the impact of discounted licenses. I would point out that the current fund balance in the general fund is approximately 50 times that of the general license account, so from the standpoint of ability to absorb the cost, the general fund is arguably better able to accommodate this impact.

The second issue, posed as a question, was whether it was appropriate to spend general fund revenue on management of fish and wildlife. Notwithstanding the fact that all Montana citizens benefit from management of our state's fish and wildlife resources, so it is certainly appropriate that the general fund contribute to the cost of management, the more appropriate question to ask is, "Should only those citizens who purchase hunting and fishing licenses contribute financially to honoring our military personnel?" FWP believes all Montanans should participate in this tribute.

The last issue raised was that the language in the bill provides that funding would flow from the general fund to the general license account, regardless of the future condition or status of the fund balance in the general fund. If the status of the general fund at some future date causes a future legislature to question the propriety of continuing to either provide reduced cost licenses or to spread the cost of these privileges across all Montana citizens, future legislatures can amend the law as necessary to address those circumstances.

FWP supports SB 243 in its current form and urges a "do pass" motion on this bill.